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Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Yarmouk Camp: Destruction Carried Out under the Guise of Liberation

The strikes launched by MiG warplanes on Abdul Kader al-Husaini Mosque in Yarmouk camp on December 16, 2012, and which culminated in the takeover of the site by the Syrian opposition forces, signaled a watershed in the lives of hundreds of Palestinian refugees sheltered in the camp. Nearly 80% of Yarmouk's residents have gone displaced at the same time as a tough blockade has been imposed on the stranded residents just one day later, on December 17, 2012.

On April 1, 2015 deadly clashes and shootouts flared up in Yarmouk camp between ISIS militias and al-Nusra Front, along with other Palestinian squads, on the one hand, and Aknaf Beit al-Maqdis on the other. ISIS ended up holding sway over more than 70% of the camp's area and perpetrating atrocious violations against civilians and public and private facilities in the camp.

The present field report, prepared by the London-based Action Group for Palestinians of the Syrian Arab Republic, spotlights some of the most serious violations committed by ISIS battalions shortly after they captured the camp until the launch of the military campaign by the Syrian government forces on April 19, 2018.

ISIS Violations in Yarmouk:

Flagrant violations have been perpetrated by ISIS militias in Yarmouk under the security pretext. Several detention centers and penal sites have been opened by ISIS to prosecute alleged lawbreakers and criminals. A dungeon has been established to that very end in al-Hajar al-Aswar area, the militias' stronghold south of the Syrian capital—Damascus. ISIS-affiliated female patrols have also been tasked with chasing female "wrongdoers" in the camp and arresting them.

Extrajudicial Executions:

On July 2, 2015, ISIS claimed, in a live footage, responsibility for the execution of a number of persons on varying allegations. As emerges in the video recording, the list of executed residents includes the Palestinian refugee Naim Younes Bahnasawi, aged 46 and sheltered in Sabina refugee camp. Two convicts were slaughtered and had their heads cut off by ISIS gunmen. Others were fatally shot in their heads.

Live snapshots released by ISIS on April 13, 2018 document the execution of the Palestinian refugee Emad al-Arrabi, the father of a three-year-old kid and a resident of Street 15. The execution was reportedly carried on charges of "insulting God".

Victims of ISIS Penal Code: Whipping, Crucifixion, and Amputation

On July 25, 2016, a resident was whipped by ISIS fighters in public over adultery charges. Pictures circulated on Facebook show an ISIS gunman as lifting a banner reading "to be whipped up 100 times".

Friday September 9, 2016 saw two women accused of taking off their full-face veils whisked in front of crowds of people at an ISIS-run checkpoint in al-Uruba Street, south of Yarmouk Camp.

On September 29, 2016, ISIS brutally whipped up three young men for smoking in public. On March 2, 2018, a number of Yarmouk residents were punished by flogging for smuggling tobacco and shaving their beards.

Meanwhile, three Palestinian young men had been subjected to an eight-hour crucifixion for 10 days at a checkpoint separating Yarmouk Camp and Yalda town. All the way through the ten-day castigation, the youths had been made to endure 100 flogs each for alleged drug smuggling into the camp via the Uruba checkpoint.

On March 10, 2018, two residents of Yarmouk got one of their limbs amputated by ISIS over theft charges.

Property Theft and the So-Called War-Spoils:

On several occasions, ISIS gunmen have seized furniture and equipment from public and private facilities, including hospitals and clinics.

On April 27, 2016, ISIS members *stole* the main *electricity generator* from pro-Palestine Charity *Basel Medical Complex* near Safed Street, in Yarmouk, and transferred it to the militias' stronghold in al-Hajar al-Aswad neighborhood, adjacent to the camp.

On Sunday February 19, 2017, ISIS mobs in Yarmouk burglarized a UNRWA office and misappropriated all of its kit, including laptops, lab microscopes, cameras, and printers, declaring, under the recommendations of their religious chief, the stolen property "war spoils."

The Blockade on Civilians and Internal Displacement:

Dozens of families remained stranded inside their homes in Haifa Street, Street 15, Yarmouk's western neighborhood, the Quds Mosque area, and al-Madaris Street as a result of the fierce clashes between ISIS and al-Nusra troops. The warring battalions also burned down civilian homes in Haifa, al-Ja'ouna, and Safad neighborhoods.

August 5, 2016 saw a tough blockade being slapped on and around the al-Rija area, Ein Ghazal, and Haifa Street, in Yarmouk after the camp's sole access road to zones led by Fatah al-Sham was closed off, blocking civilians' access out of and into the area and banning food entry to Fatah al-Sham battalion in attempt to force them to lay down their arms and leave the camp once and for all.

The blockade has had disastrous effects on the lives of stranded civilians, the majority of whom remained without food and medicines for weeks. In the meantime, armed forces managed to enter foodstuff through government-run checkpoints at nightfall, according to affidavits from the camp.

The situation got from bad to worse on April 4, 2017 after ISIS militias ordered civilians in Yarmouk to evacuate their homes near ISIS sites, namely Abdul Qader al-Husaini Mosque and Haifa Street, among other neighborhoods.

On June 29, 2017, 50 families were forced out of their homes under the pretext of their proximity to flashpoints with the nearby Yalda town.

Child Brainwashing and Indoctrination:

So-called "Cubs of the Caliphate" drill camps were set up by ISIS at schools under its control in the camp. Some 150 children were forced into such military exercises, being taken away from their parents and relatives, whom they could only meet for short spans of time and under strict regulations.

Recruited children are given weapons and ordered to abide by the religious and military instructions given by their chiefs until they grown into semi-automatic tools of systematic killing and destruction.

Conclusion:

After ISIS extremists overran Yarmouk Camp, a spate of flagrant violations and horrendous crimes has seen the day under the religious guise.

ISIS refusal to sign a reconciliation deal that would result in its departure from southern Damascus areas, including Yarmouk Camp, has sparked an unabated escalation by the Syrian government forces, which have now found another pretext—that is liberating the camp from ISIS grips—to step up military offensives and violence.

Caught between the hammer and the anvil, stranded civilians continue to sound distress signals after life has become unbearable in the camp. In the midst of such an alarming situation, the international community should urgently step in and take a firm stance against the warring parties and those involved in war crimes against civilians. Urgent steps should also be made to reconstruct destroyed facilities in the camp, provide Palestinian refugees with the legal and physical protection, and ensure a safe return for the residents.